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SUBJECT: ICRC TO RESTART PRISON MONITORING, CAUTIOUSLY

REF: TASHKENT 947

Classified By: CDA BRAD HANSON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Head of Mission told Poloff that his Mission plans to organize a monitoring visit of one of Tashkent's principal detention facilities on May 21. This will be the first such visit since ICRC suspended its prison monitoring program in ¶2004. However, he noted, this visit is only a "test case," and he is not optimistic about the prospects for future prison monitoring. The Government of Uzbekistan, he said, is clearly only interested in ICRC prison visits for their political value as EU delegates meet in Brussels to decide on the future of sanctions against Uzbekistan. He said that ICRC is under pressure not only from the Uzbek side, but also from "certain EU member states" (i.e., Germany), who have a political interest in seeing prison visits resume. He said that he sees no genuine desire on the part of the Uzbeks to cooperate with ICRC according to its worldwide modalities. Unfortunately, we agree with his assessment. End summary.

¶2. (C) International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Head of Mission Edmond Corthesy (protect) told Poloff on May 11 that his Mission plans to undertake a monitoring visit to Tashkent's main pre-trial detention facility, "Tashtyurma," on May 21. (Note: Tashtyurma is a key facility in Uzbekistan's detention system, with an estimated 2,000 inmates at any given time. This is the location where virtually all defendants are housed while awaiting trial in Tashkent's criminal court system. End note.) This would be the first visit under ICRC's prison monitoring program since the program was formally suspended in December 2004. ICRC suspended the program after several months in which Uzbek officials failed to cooperate with ICRC to facilitate monitoring according to ICRC's international modalities. Since that time, the two sides have conducted continual negotiations aimed at restarting the monitoring program, but without concrete results.

¶3. (C) Corthesy said he was under no illusions about the true reason that the Uzbek Government is suddenly so eager to cooperate with ICRC. He said that Uzbek officials have put strong pressure on his Mission to organize a monitoring visit before May 14, the date when the European Union meets in Brussels for its General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting, where it will decide whether to maintain or alter sanctions against Uzbekistan. Corthesy said that "certain EU member states" were also pressuring ICRC to show results before May 14. (Comment: Corthesy was clearly referring to Germany, which has made improved EU-Uzbekistan

relations a key component of its Central Asia strategy during its EU Presidency. End comment.) However, Corthesy said, he is not interested in allowing ICRC to be used as a political pawn in the sanctions debate. He said that ICRC had selected May 21 as the projected date for the next monitoring visit ostensibly for logistical reasons -- so that a Geneva-based ICRC physician may receive an Uzbek visa and participate in the monitoring. However, he implied strongly that had this reason not conveniently placed the monitoring after the EU sanctions decision, ICRC would have found another suitable reason to delay it.

¶4. (C) Corthesy noted that he holds out no great hopes that the May 21 monitoring visit will herald the end of ICRC's difficulties with the Uzbeks. He said that it is obvious to him, based on his Uzbek interlocutors' attitude and "body language," that they have no genuine interest in cooperating with ICRC. Rather, he said, they want to display a show of cooperation to the international community for political purposes. He said that the Uzbek Government has attempted at every turn to blame ICRC for the lack of progress in resuming prison visits. At the EU-Uzbekistan Human Rights Dialogue in Tashkent on May 9, Uzbek officials told EU delegates that they had been prepared for some time to facilitate new ICRC prison visits, but that ICRC had failed to respond to their offer (reftel). The May 21 visit, he said, would be a "test case," and based upon the results, ICRC would decide whether or not to continue the program with further visits.

¶5. (C) Comment: For an ICRC official, Corthesy is unusually frank in discussing his irritation with his Uzbek interlocutors. Unfortunately, his assessment of the host government's willingness to cooperate tracks precisely with our own view. The Government of Uzbekistan has no intention of laying open its detention system to international scrutiny except on its own terms, for its own political gain. Post will note the results of ICRC's May 21 monitoring visit with great interest.

HANSON